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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH MOROCCAN FM FASSI-FIHRI;
MOROCCO TO HOST 2009 FORUM FOR THE FUTURE

Classified by Ambassador Richard Olson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Meeting on the margins of the October 18-19 Forum for the Future ministerial in Abu Dhabi, Deputy Secretary Negroponte and NEA A/S Welch held a cordial exchange with Moroccan Foreign Minister Fassi-Fihri on three core issues: the Forum for the Future, the Western Sahara negotiation process, and the post-coup situation in Mauritania. Morocco has agreed to host the sixth Forum for the Future in partnership with G-8 co-chair Italy and is already in discussions with the GOI. Though the GOM believes the G-8 has not been as engaged in the Forum as it could be, it is pleased with a USG commitment to press this priority beyond November elections. On the Western Sahara, the GOM is eager to launch the Fifth Round of UN-sponsored talks, citing transition to a new UN special envoy (Christopher Ross) and Algeria exploitation of the situation. The Deputy Secretary reiterated USG support for a solution based on autonomy within Moroccan sovereignty, which Fassi-Fihri appreciated. On Mauritania, he said the military junta does not want to stay in power and Morocco supports a plan to reinstate deposed President-elect Seddi Abdulla and then hold elections. The junta is in discussions with Abdulla and seeking constitutional revisions. FM Fassi-Fihri noted that the French and Germans were talking to the junta and said the USG should be engaged in the process rather than "isolating itself." End summary.

MOROCCO "HONORED" TO HOST NEXT YEAR'S FORUM

¶2. (SBU) The Deputy Secretary opened a cordial 45 minute exchange on October 18 with Moroccan FM Fassi-Fihri by asking if the GOM was willing to host next year's Forum for the Future. (Note: Rabat hosted the first Forum in 2004. End note.) Fassi-Fihri said his government was "ready to take this responsibility" and hoped to assure continuity of the Forum process. Hosting is an "honor for Morocco and for Morocco's civil society" in coordination with Italy, next year's G-8 President and co-chair. The decision was ready for announcement. The Deputy Secretary noted his pleasure and stressed the need for momentum in the Forum process.

¶3. (SBU) Fassi-Fihri said countries in the region were happy with Morocco as host for a second time and hoped for continuity. Nonetheless, many feared a pending change in the U.S. administration could stall the Forum process. He appreciated USG assurances that this would not be the case and that the USG was committed to Forum goals for the long term. The Deputy Secretary said potential USG leaders had been and would continue to be briefed on the Forum. While nuances may change, the substance of USG commitment would remain. He cited apparent European interest in maintaining the dialogue as well.

¶4. (C) Fassi-Fihri said the feeling "in the South" was that the G-8 had not been fully engaged in the Forum, although he acknowledged that assembling regional governments and NGOs was certainly "not easy." He noted the reluctance of Egypt and Saudi Arabia to engage the NGO community and potential "exploitation" of the Forum process by Algeria. Fassi-Fihri advised that the G-8 could show more commitment by perhaps providing financial support to specific Forum-sponsored projects. The "South" wants the USG to "encourage but not impose." Fassi-Fihri said all had agreed that reform cannot be imposed and stressed the need for concrete results, tangible projects and continuity.

WESTERN SAHARA: MOROCCO SEEKS "CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS"

¶5. (C) On the subject of Western Sahara, Fassi-Fihri said UN Under Secretary for Political Affairs Lynne Pascoe's visit to Morocco had been useful. Morocco had found the UN's decision to allow the former UN special envoy's contract to expire "brutal," as it had been done at Algeria's behest. Fassi-Fihri's government fears that Algeria could "exploit the situation" of a new special envoy in complicating the ongoing talks. The GOM would welcome Christopher Ross as the new envoy, but it was important to "create conditions for success" for Ross even if it meant delaying Ross' appointment for several weeks. It was vital that Ross not start at ground zero in assessing the issue and in the negotiating process. Ross already knows the situation and need not conduct a listening tour of the region and then propose some new process or solution; instead, he should promptly call for the next round of talks. Fassi-Fihri said it was necessary to have clarity on what Ross' public and perhaps private mandate would be from the Secretary General, and Fassi-Fihri had thus sent a list of questions to Pascoe to clarify the issue; Fassi-Fihri

agreed to send the list to A/S Welch.

¶6. (C) The Deputy Secretary expressed the USG view that the realistic resolution for Western Sahara was as a "state of autonomy" within Morocco. Fassi-Fihri agreed but inferred that Algeria had other interests. He stressed there would be a negative impact in Morocco if we were to go back to stage one of the negotiating process, which was what Algeria wanted. Rather, the GOM wanted to engage in the planned fifth round of talks as soon as possible. Fassi-Fihri noted that some parties had protested the "taking off the table" of the independence solution in the negotiation process, blaming Algeria and the Frente Polisario. A/S Welch reassuringly reiterated that the USG viewed autonomy within Moroccan sovereignty as the only plausible resolution, which should be the basis of UN discussions.

¶7. (C) FM Fassi-Fihri stressed again that the GOM was asking Pascoe to convene the fifth round of Western Sahara talks as soon as possible. He lamented Algerian maneuvering, including having told his government that the Algeria - Morocco bilateral relationship could not progress until the Western Sahara situation was resolved. He thanked the Deputy Secretary for the USG position and reiterated GOM desire to move forward and not "go back to stage one."

MAURITANIA: MOROCCO SUPPORTS TEMPORARY REINSTATEMENT OF DEPOSED PRESIDENT AND SUBSEQUENT ELECTIONS

¶8. (C) The Deputy Secretary asked how to reverse damage done by the recent military coup in Mauritania, which had created an unsatisfactory status quo. Fassi-Fihri said former Mauritanian President-elect Seddi Abdulla was deposed because the Parliament was not stable and self-interested people "were controlling him." Morocco's belief was that Abdulla should be reinstated "for a short time" while new elections are organized, although Fassi-Fihri said this would not be easy. Morocco was concerned that the current military and coup leader, General Mohamed Aziz, either would not condone the election or could resign his position and run for office.

¶9. (C) Fassi-Fihri said discussions in Mauritania revolved around revising the Constitution to give the Parliament ability to impeach the President, thereby avoiding the rationale for another coup d'etat. He said the ruling military junta was in touch with the deposed President on constitutional reforms and the continuation of certain institutions. Fassi-Fihri asserted that "this junta is not

like Burma," they "don't want to stay" in power.

¶10. (C) A/S Welch said we had made no direct contact with the junta although some European nations had done so. Fassi-Fihri told his interlocutors bluntly that the USG was "isolating itself" by not talking to the junta; the USG should not let the French and Germans control engagement in pursuit of their own interests. He said the GOM did not support the coup but wanted a broader dialogue on the situation. Fassi-Fihri repeated that General Aziz wanted to give up power, but might also complicate things by trying to run for office in a potential election.

¶11. (SBU) U.S. Participants:

-- The Deputy Secretary
-- Ambassador Richard Olson
-- NEA A/S David Welch
-- DRL A/S David Kramer
-- NEA DAS Kent Patton
-- DRL DAS Erica Barkes-Ruggles
-- Aaron Jost, D Staff
-- Ralph Falzone, Notetaker

Moroccan Participants:

-- FM El Tayeb Fassi-Fihri
-- Amb. Yousef Al Umran, DG of Bilateral Relations
-- Amb. Abdelkader Zauoi, Amb to the UAE

¶12. (U) This cable was cleared by the office of the Deputy Secretary.

OLSON